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Document Title: On the Relation between Form and Content: Telephone

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Course: Engl 1147

Course Title: Mystery in the Story

Year of Award: Spring 2016

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## Spring 2016 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See [creativecommons.org](http://creativecommons.org) for more information about cc licensing.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Tuesday, May 24. No exceptions can be made.

## Spring 2016 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Katherine Thorsteinson

Department ENGL Course # and title ENGL1147 "Mystery in the Story"

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna O'Hara ([dlo1@cornell.edu](mailto:dlo1@cornell.edu)) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

"On the Relation Between Form and Content: Telephone"  
Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature



Date May 22nd, 2016

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"On the Relation Between Form and Content: Telephone"  
Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature



Date May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines  
101 McGraw Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY  
14853

May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

To the selection committee for the Knight Award for Writing Exercises,

Please find my application materials attached to this letter: the instructions and an example of a student response. The following letter outlines my brief descriptive abstract, exercise rationale, and reflections. This class exercise was used in a first-year writing seminar for the Knight School's "Writing in the Disciplines." Students seemed to find it both fun and useful to their writing.

#### **Brief abstract**

This class exercise was developed from the game telephone in which people whisper into their neighbor's ear around a circle and note how drastically the sentence changes due to cumulative misinterpretations. In this version, students formulate thesis statements and then paraphrase those of their neighbors, revealing how drastically these arguments change by the end. The emphasis is on clarity and accuracy of language. It also reveals how form influences content—the idea that language is never neutral.

**Keywords:** language use and bias, clarity and accuracy, paraphrasing, thesis statements, telephone game, group exercise

#### **Exercise rationale**

Early on in our classes, we worked on formulating theses and discussed the issues of argument, scope, and significance. Students learned that thesis statements need to introduce an argument, clarify how they orient themselves in terms of the argument, and what features make this argument interesting or useful. This exercise gave them a chance to put this knowledge into practice under low risk time restrictive conditions. It thus enabled me to show them that writer's block is an unnecessary problem that results more from stage fright and procrastination than lack of creativity or knowledge. Around this time of the semester we were also experimenting with various forms of citing: summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting. This exercise asked students to paraphrase, and demonstrated how this form of citation often slightly alters the original meaning of a source. Thus, in situations where language is particularly important for an argument, quotation might be more appropriate. For cases where students are using someone else's ideas to formulate or contextualize their own, paraphrasing might be better. But in this case, it becomes very important to flag which

ideas come from the source and to represent these ideas as accurately as possible. As a final reason for designing this exercise, I wanted to create a space for collaborative, fun, and engaging scholarship in our class. Throughout the term, I tried as much as possible to design exercises like this one that encouraged students to work together in a respectful manner.

## **Reflections**

Students worked very well under pressure, producing interesting and insightful theses in very little time. They seemed to be engaged in the task and liked the chance to break up our usual lessons about syntax and style to play a game. They worked well together, equally respectful and constructive in writing suggested improvements. I had students write three revisions each, which had the additional benefit of exposing their thinking to arguments from a number of other students in class. I then returned the theses to their original authors and gave them some time to observe the changes before opening up the exercise to discussion. As a group, we conducted a close reading of two or three examples, picking up on particular words that carried different connotations or set the reader up for slightly different expectations that would likely change the entire paper. After this group close reading, I think most students were more convinced about the subtle power of language to shape the direction of argumentation. I was pleasantly surprised therefore to find that this exercise provided an additional opportunity to develop the skill of close reading— an important component of our course.

Gratefully,

Katherine Thorsteinson

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## In-class Exercise on the Relation Between Form and Content: Telephone

### Task:

On a piece of paper write a 2-3 sentence thesis statement about Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely* (we have talked about the proper structure of thesis statements already). Put your name next to this thesis statement. Pass your thesis statement to your left. On the new page you've just received, rewrite the thesis statement you observe. You may feel the impulse to improve the clarity and/or concision of the *language*— that's great! However much you might want to improve the *argument* you read, ensure that you do your best **NOT** to alter the content or stance of the statement. The task is simply to change the structure and style of the writing. Once you have completed this revision, fold the paper so that the statement above yours is obscured and only yours remains visible. Pass the statement to your left again. Repeat this task until I call for completion.

### Things to consider:

**Strategies**→ Use synonyms, reorder sentences, alter punctuation, change the syntax, and consider the register of diction. Do not be afraid to expand or contract word count/sentence number.

**Difficulties**→ If you notice ambiguity or vagueness, you have some decisions to make: do you preserve the multiplicity of meaning or choose the most likely meaning and edit for clarity?

### Example:

- 1) For Chandler, quality in writing was entirely a function of language, that evocative "echo from a distant hill" that could occasionally be achieved even in the hard-boiled detective story. Nevertheless Chandler also desperately wanted that sense of achieved shape that comes when the writer can simultaneously satisfy his sense of how things hang together in the real world, along with his aesthetic need for unity and pattern. This essay will explore how Chandler managed to integrate matter into form, detail into structure, background action into plot—concentrating primarily on his two very differently structured masterpieces *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*.
- 2) Raymond Chandler believed that the quality of writing was determined by form (style and structure) more than content, but still aimed to integrate these aspects of his writing into a cohesive whole. This paper will consider Chandler's techniques of form-content integration in two very different texts: *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*. In particular, how did Chandler manage to integrate matter into form, detail into structure, and background action into plot?
- 3) Form is preeminent in Chandler's conception of writing. Nonetheless, he demonstrates a skillful ability to balance aspects of form *and* content in his two quite distinct novels, *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*. In fact, as I will argue in the following essay, Chandler manages to uniquely *integrate* aspects of form and content in his writing such that both are mutually constitutive.
- 4) In *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* Raymond Chandler integrates both the form and content of his writing. This is true despite the fact that Chandler usually prioritizes form in his writing.

Original thesis modified from the following source:

Richter, David H.. "Background Action and Ideology: Grey Men and Dope Doctors in Raymond Chandler". *Narrative* 2.1 (1994): 29–40. Richter, David H.. "Background Action and Ideology: Grey Men and Dope Doctors in Raymond Chandler". *Narrative* 2.1 (1994): 29–40. Web.

Shazell Archer

Through the writing of Farewell, My Lovely Raymond Chandler illuminates the issues of race, gender and class through his characterization of Marlowe, the Negroes, the Indian and Ms. Grayle. The story is told through the eyes of Marlowe, who is seemingly outside the constraints of society, to illustrate ~~these~~ flaws.

In ~~Chandler's~~ his novel Farewell, My Lovely, Raymond Chandler highlights societal problems of race, gender, and class through the point of view of the supposed outsider, Marlowe. Marlowe does this ~~by~~ through characterizing Negroes, Ms. Grayle, + the Indian.

In Raymond Chandler's novel, Farewell My Lovely, social issues of race, gender, and class are highlighted through the perspective of a supposed outsider, Marlowe. Marlowe especially does this through the characterization of Negroes, Ms. Grayle, and the Indian.

In Raymond Chandler's Farewell, My Lovely, Detective Marlowe presents an outsider's perspective on various instances of racial diversity, gender roles, and class disparity. Chandler utilizes the characterization of Negroes, the Indian, and characters such as Mrs. Grayle to develop Marlowe's perception.